

July 23, 2017  
Pentecost 7  
Wheat and Weeds  
Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Psalm 86:11-17; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43  
The Rev. Dorothy Cottingham  
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tigard, OR

Fellow Ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Gracia y paz del Dios, Padre, Hijo e Espíritu Santo

Last week we established that I'm not much of a gardener. As proof, I showed you the dying rosebush my friend gave me. Further proof is the state of our tiny patch of what we erroneously call a lawn. Last summer, disgusted with the dandelions in the little patch behind our house, I grabbed the Round-Up and sprayed a lethal dose on each of those evil plants. I watched them shrivel and die.

Yes! Take that, you invaders!

It didn't take long to see the remnant of desirable grass shrivel and die along with the weeds. With a heavy sigh, I called a landscaper to completely redo the 20x40 foot patch. We watched as the lifeless seed produced silky new shoots and finally establish itself as grass, and healthy dandelions. Who planted those dandelions?!?!

Today we hear another parable about seeds and weeds, Let anyone with ears, listen. There is a subtle shift in the emphasis between this parable and last week's. Last week we heard the parable of the seed, the sower and the soil.

In that parable Jesus described the different soils onto which the seed is sown. The unwelcoming hard path. The seed-withering rocky path. The weed-filled soil that strangles growth and the nourishing, receptive soil where plants flourish. We considered what type of soil we might be and discovered that we are sometimes one and sometimes another.

Today, we hear Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to good seed invaded by bad seed. A straightforward story about an evil parasite planted on top of healthy grain under the cover of darkness. Someone sowed good seed expecting that a healthy harvest.

And while everyone was asleep, trusting that the seed and the soil would do their work, an enemy snuck into the field and sowed weeds. As expected, the wheat came up and so did the weeds. The workers ask "what shall we do about the weeds?"

What SHOULD the farm master do? Should she run to Home Depot and grab a load of Round-Up? should she instruct the workers to pull out the offensive weeds? or should she wait it out?

It would not be wise to try to pull up the rye-grass. It looks so much like wheat, the workers could mistake it for weeds. The wheat is so fragile it may be uprooted along with the weeds. The master of the farm has to decide which approach to take she instructs the workers to wait trusting that the wheat will grow strong amidst the weeds and that the weeds will not overtake the growing wheat.

She knows that when it is time to harvest, the reapers will know the difference between wheat and weeds. They will separate the good harvest from the bad harvest. That is their job.

Most attempts to eradicate unwanted growth are unsuccessful. Too many Christian communities claim to know wheat from weeds. Thinking ourselves to be true believers, we do everything possible to rid the community of those who we think are sabotaging the harvest of faith.

This is a parable that reminds us to beware of judging others. Instead of wielding a Christian weed-eater in order to create our perfect vision of the kingdom of God, we need to include and welcome even the most difficult people into our midst. To do so strengthens the root system of the entire community. Because there is uncertainty about which is wheat and which are weeds both are nurtured side by side. As Martin Luther said, we are at the same time saints and sinners – *simil justus et peccator* – simultaneously justified and sinful. We are both the wheat and the weeds.

And in the end, the wheat cannot harvest itself, nor can the weeds. So, someone will carry out that task, not the owner, not the farmer, not the workers, but the reapers. The reapers know the difference between wheat and chaff. The reapers will separate what is good and what is bad. Not even the farmer has to worry about that.

Where do you see yourself in this parable? Sometimes we are the master, the weed planter, the workers and, sometimes we are the wheat and sometimes we are the weeds. In the end, there is nothing better for us than to sit in the dirt and grow.

Jesus gives us what appears to be a simple explanation of the parable. But, as with all parables, there is more nuance than simplicity. Jesus says the sower is the Son of Man, the son of humanity and the field is the world. The seed is the children of the kingdom that's you and me, and anyone who lives in the Spirit and not the flesh. As St. Paul puts it, the seed is all who bear witness, even a little bit, to the mercy and justice of God's kingdom.

Now here's the tricky part, the bad seeds are the children of evil. But Jesus does not describe the exact nature of evil. Consider the evil we have witnessed on the streets of our cities, in the halls of government, on MAX trains. The humanitarian crisis at our country's southern border, beloved children of God fleeing violence, drugs, rape and death in their country are met with shouts and threats of death.

We hear all of creation groaning and longing to see the kingdom of God revealed. Not a distant kingdom where "someday everyone will get along" All of creation longs for the kingdom of God here and now.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is actively revealing the kingdom of God to refugees from war-torn areas. Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton has written grace-filled yet firm letters to the United States Congress and the U.S. President on numerous social justice issues. The ELCA maintains an office of advocacy and justice in Washington, DC

We are the vessels who scatter the seed of God's grace and mercy into the world. We water and nurture the wheat AND the weeds! Our role is not to determine who are wheat and who are weeds. Our role is to reveal God to the whole creation.

We are the witnesses the ones who testify to Christ's compassion, justice and mercy. Justice - NOT as punishment; justice that is sharing what we have with those who don't have what they need. We share our material wealth and we share the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We share that good news in word and in action.

In the end, God will be the judge between the weeds and the wheat. That is not our job. Our job is to speak the truth to the powerful. Tell them: The kingdom of God is here, now and it is a radically different kingdom than the kingdoms of this world! Let everyone with ears listen!

Thanks be to God!